

IN THE UNITED STATES DISTRICT COURT
FOR THE EASTERN DISTRICT OF MICHIGAN

Case No. 5:24-cv-13313

PREPARED FOOD PHOTOS, INC. f/k/a
ADLIFE MARKETING &
COMMUNICATIONS CO., INC.,

Plaintiff,

v.

BUSCH'S, INC. d/b/a BUSCH'S FRESH
FOOD MARKET

Defendant.

COMPLAINT

Plaintiff Prepared Food Photos, Inc. f/k/a Adlife Marketing & Communications Co., Inc. (“Plaintiff”) sues defendant Busch's, Inc. d/b/a Busch's Fresh Food Market (“Defendant”), and alleges as follows:

THE PARTIES

1. Plaintiff is a corporation organized and existing under the laws of the State of Florida with its principal place of business located in Broward County, Florida.
2. Defendant is a corporation organized and existing under the laws of the State of Michigan with its principal place of business located at 2240 S Main St, Ann Arbor, MI 48103. Defendant’s agent for service of process is John J. Busch, 2240 S Main St, Ann Arbor, MI 48103.

JURISDICTION AND VENUE

3. This Court has subject matter jurisdiction over this action pursuant to 28 U.S.C. §§ 1331 and 1338(a).
4. This Court has personal jurisdiction over Defendant because it has maintained

sufficient minimum contacts with this State such that the exercise of personal jurisdiction over it would not offend traditional notions of fair play and substantial justice.

5. Venue properly lies in this district pursuant to 28 U.S.C. § 1400(a) because Defendant or its agents reside or may be found in this district “The language ‘may be found’ means any district which may assert personal jurisdiction over a defendant.” Johnson v. Sky Media, LLC, No. 1:19-3269-MGL-PJG, 2020 U.S. Dist. LEXIS 73016, at *16-17 (D.S.C. Apr. 23, 2020). In other words, venue is proper in his District because Defendant is subject to personal jurisdiction in this District. See Big Guy's Pinball, LLC v. Lipham, No. 14-CV-14185, 2015 U.S. Dist. LEXIS 89512, at *2 (E.D. Mich. July 10, 2015).

FACTS

I. Plaintiff’s Business and History

6. Plaintiff is in the business of licensing high-end, professional photographs for the food industry.

7. Through its commercial website (www.preparedfoodphotos.com), Plaintiff offers a monthly subscription service which provides access to/license of tens of thousands of professional images.

8. Plaintiff charges its clients (generally, grocery stores, restaurant chains, food service companies, etc.) a minimum monthly fee of \$999.00 for access to its library of professional photographs.

9. Plaintiff does not license individual photographs or otherwise make individual photographs available for purchase. Plaintiff’s business model relies on its recurring monthly subscription service such that Plaintiff can continue to maintain its impressive portfolio.

10. Plaintiff owns each of the photographs available for license on its website and

serves as the licensing agent with respect to licensing such photographs for limited use by Plaintiff's customers. To that end, Plaintiff's standard terms include a limited, non-transferable license for use of any photograph by the customer only. Plaintiff's license terms make clear that all copyright ownership remains with Plaintiff and that its customers are not permitted to transfer, assign, or sub-license any of Plaintiff's photographs to another person/entity.

II. The Works at Issue in this Lawsuit

The First Photograph

11. In 1995, a professional photographer employed and/or contracted by Plaintiff created a photograph titled "SteakTopSirloinCooked001_ADL" (the "First Photograph"). A copy of the First Photograph is displayed below:



12. The First Photograph was registered by Plaintiff (pursuant to a work-for-hire agreement with the author that transferred all rights and title in the photograph to Plaintiff) with the Register of Copyrights on April 22, 2017 and was assigned Registration No. VA 2-044-969. A true and correct copy of the Certificate of Registration pertaining to the First Photograph is attached hereto as **Exhibit "A."**

The Second Photograph

13. In 1997, a professional photographer employed and/or contracted by Plaintiff

created a photograph titled “RawPorkChopCCBnIn001_ADL” (the “Second Photograph”). A copy of the Second Photograph is displayed below:



14. The Second Photograph was registered by Plaintiff (pursuant to a work-for-hire agreement with the author that transferred all rights and title in the photograph to Plaintiff) with the Register of Copyrights on January 20, 2017 and was assigned Registration No. VA 2-027-172. A true and correct copy of the Certificate of Registration pertaining to the Second Photograph is attached hereto as **Exhibit “B.”**

15. The First Photograph and the Second Photograph are collectively referred to herein as the “Work.”

16. Plaintiff is the owner of the Work and has remained the owner at all times material hereto.

Defendant’s Unlawful Activities

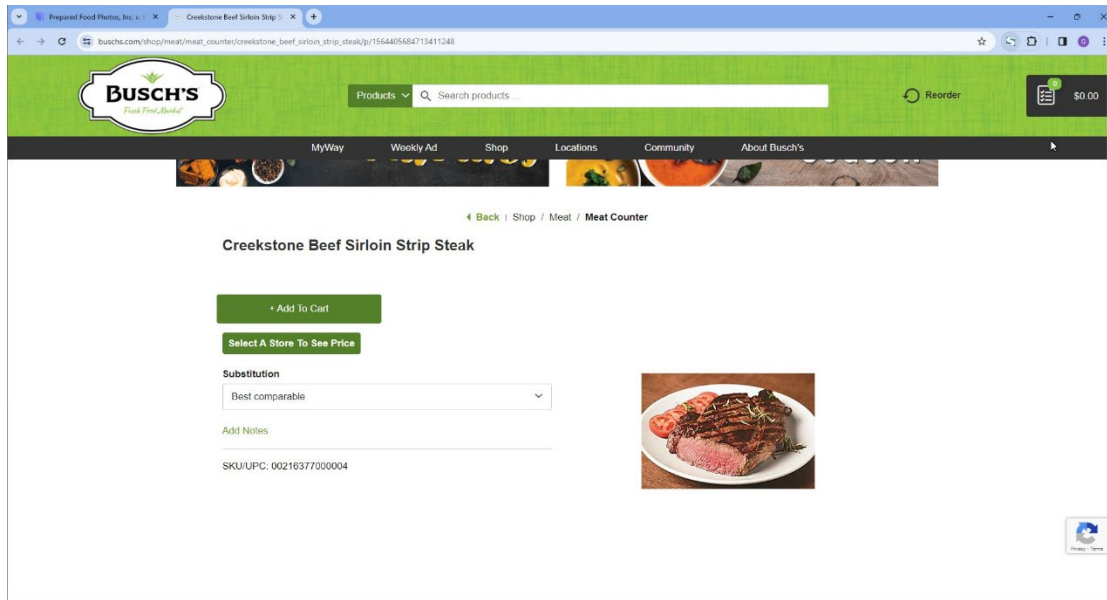
17. Defendant owns and operates sixteen grocery stores in Southeast Michigan.

18. Defendant advertises/markets its business through its website (<https://www.buschs.com/>), social media (e.g., https://www.facebook.com/buschs?ref=br_rs), and other forms of advertising.

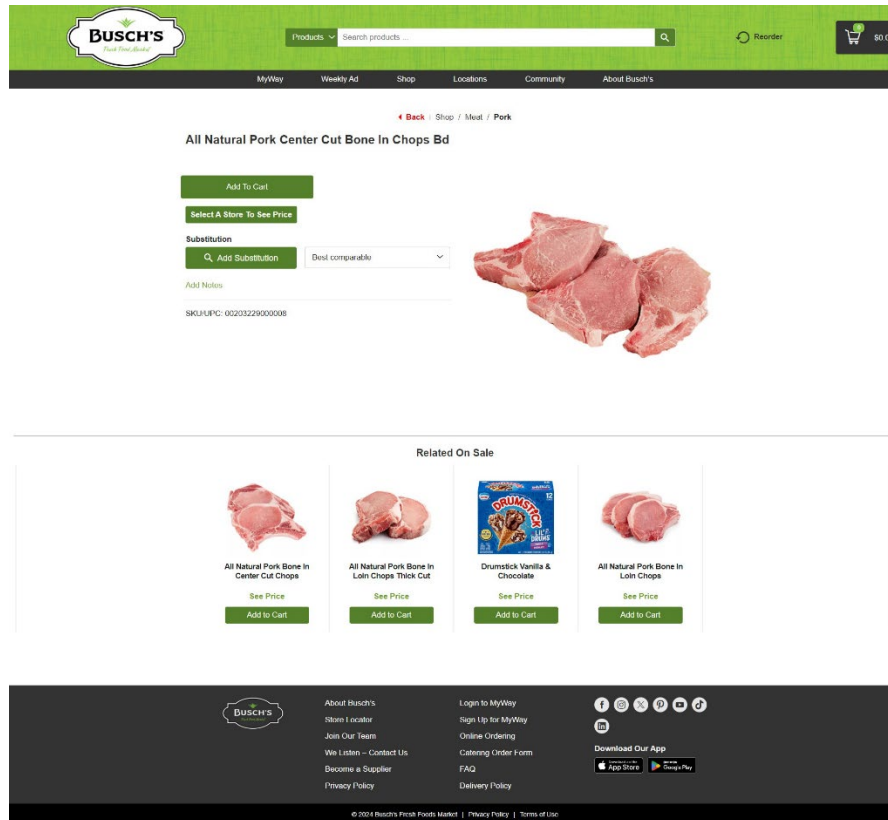
19. On a date after the above-referenced copyright registration of the Work, Defendant

displayed and/or published the Work on its website, webpage, and/or social media at:

https://www.buschs.com/shop/meat/meat_counter/creekstone_beef_sirloin_strip_steak/p/1564405684713411248



https://www.buschs.com/shop/meat/pork/all_natural_pork_center_cut_bone_in_chops_bd/p/1564405684714097332



20. A true and correct copy of screenshots of Defendant's website, webpage, and/or social media, displaying the copyrighted Work, is attached hereto as **Exhibit "C."**

21. Defendant is not and has never been licensed to use or display the Work. Defendant never contacted Plaintiff to seek permission to use the Work in connection with Defendant's website, webpage, and/or social media – even though the Work that was copied is clearly professional stock photography that would put Defendant on notice that the Work was not intended for public use.

22. Defendant utilized the Work for commercial use.

23. Upon information and belief, Defendant located a copy of the Work on the internet and, rather than contact Plaintiff to secure a license, simply copied the Work for its own commercial use.

24. Through its ongoing diligent efforts to identify unauthorized use of its photographs, Plaintiff discovered Defendant's unauthorized use/display of the Work in July 2023 and April 2024. Following Plaintiff's discovery, Plaintiff notified Defendant in writing of such unauthorized use.

25. All conditions precedent to this action have been performed or have been waived.

COUNT I – COPYRIGHT INFRINGEMENT

26. Plaintiff re-alleges and incorporates paragraphs 1 through 25 as set forth above.

27. Each photograph comprising the Work is an original work of authorship, embodying copyrightable subject matter, that is subject to the full protection of the United States copyright laws (17 U.S.C. § 101 *et seq.*).

28. Plaintiff owns a valid copyright in each photograph comprising the Work, having registered the Work with the Register of Copyrights and owning sufficient rights, title, and interest to such copyright to afford Plaintiff standing to bring this lawsuit and assert the claim(s) herein.

29. As a result of Plaintiff's reproduction, distribution, and public display of the Work, Defendant had access to the Work prior to its own reproduction, distribution, and public display of the Work on Defendant's website, webpage, and/or social media.

30. Defendant reproduced, distributed, displayed, and/or publicly displayed the Work without authorization from Plaintiff.

31. By its actions, Defendant infringed and violated Plaintiff's exclusive rights in violation of the Copyright Act, 17 U.S.C. § 501. Defendant's infringement was either direct, vicarious, and/or contributory.

32. Defendant's infringement was willful as it acted with actual knowledge or reckless

disregard for whether its conduct infringed upon Plaintiff's copyright. Notably, Defendant itself utilizes a copyright disclaimer on its website ("© 2024 Busch's Fresh Foods Market"), indicating that Defendant understands the importance of copyright protection/intellectual property rights and is actually representing that it owns each of the photographs published on its website. See, e.g., Bell v. ROI Prop. Grp. Mgmt., LLC, No. 1:18-cv-00043-TWP-DLP, 2018 U.S. Dist. LEXIS 127717, at *3 (S.D. Ind. July 31, 2018) ("[T]he willfulness of ROI's infringement is evidenced by the fact that at the bottom of the webpage on which the Indianapolis photograph was unlawfully published appeared the following: 'Copyright © 2017.' By placing a copyright mark at the bottom of its webpage that contained Mr. Bell's copyrighted Indianapolis Photograph, Mr. Bell asserts ROI willfully infringed his copyright by claiming that it owned the copyright to everything on the webpage."); John Perez Graphics & Design, LLC v. Green Tree Inv. Grp., Inc., Civil Action No. 3:12-cv-4194-M, 2013 U.S. Dist. LEXIS 61928, at *12-13 (N.D. Tex. May 1, 2013) ("Once on Defendant's website, Defendant asserted ownership of Plaintiff's Registered Work by including a copyright notice at the bottom of the page. Based on these allegations, the Court finds Plaintiff has sufficiently pled a willful violation...."). Defendant clearly understands that professional photography such as the Work is generally paid for and cannot simply be copied from the internet.

33. Plaintiff has been damaged as a direct and proximate result of Defendant's infringement.

34. Plaintiff is entitled to recover its actual damages resulting from Defendant's unauthorized use of the Work and, at Plaintiff's election (pursuant to 17 U.S.C. § 504(b)), Plaintiff is entitled to recover damages based on a disgorgement of Defendant's profits from infringement of the Work, which amounts shall be proven at trial.

35. Alternatively, and at Plaintiff's election, Plaintiff is entitled to statutory damages pursuant to 17 U.S.C. § 504(c), in such amount as deemed proper by the Court.

36. Pursuant to 17 U.S.C. § 505, Plaintiff is further entitled to recover its costs and attorneys' fees as a result of Defendant's conduct.

37. Defendant's conduct has caused, and any continued infringing conduct will continue to cause, irreparable injury to Plaintiff unless enjoined by the Court. Plaintiff has no adequate remedy at law. Pursuant to 17 U.S.C. § 502, Plaintiff is entitled to a permanent injunction prohibiting infringement of Plaintiff's exclusive rights under copyright law.

WHEREFORE, Plaintiff demands judgment against Defendant as follows:

- a. A declaration that Defendant has infringed Plaintiff's copyrights in the Work;
- b. A declaration that such infringement is willful;
- c. An award of actual damages and disgorgement of profits as the Court deems proper or, at Plaintiff's election, an award of statutory damages for each photograph comprising the Work;
- d. Awarding Plaintiff its costs and reasonable attorneys' fees pursuant to 17 U.S.C. § 505;
- e. Awarding Plaintiff interest, including prejudgment interest, on the foregoing amounts;
- f. Permanently enjoining Defendant, its employees, agents, officers, directors, attorneys, successors, affiliates, subsidiaries and assigns, and all those in active concert and participation with Defendant, from directly or indirectly infringing Plaintiff's copyrights or continuing to display, transfer, advertise, reproduce, or otherwise market any works derived or copied from the Work or to participate or assist in any such activity; and
- g. For such other relief as the Court deems just and proper.

Dated: December 12, 2024.

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By: /s/ Daniel DeSouza, Esq.
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